

Testimony of Robert Pierce Forbes to the Appropriations Subcommittee, Connecticut General Assembly, February 17, 2017

Honorable Members:

I have been a Connecticut resident and a scholar of Connecticut and national history for thirty years. During that time, I have served as a board member of the Amistad Committee and of Amistad America, the Connecticut Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, and the Connecticut State Historic Records Advisory Board. I currently serve as the President of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater New Haven. I was also the founding Associate Director of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery and Abolition at Yale University, and at as an assistant professor at the University of Connecticut's Torrington campus, I instituted the northwest Connecticut regional competition of Connecticut History Day.

In all these capacities, I have worked closely with and received assistance from the Connecticut Humanities Council and the organizations, such as the Connecticut League of History Organizations, that it supports. I have been awed by the extraordinary impact that the CHC has been able to make in this state with exceedingly slender resources. The multiplier effect of dollars directed toward cultural organizations to the economic health of communities has been well documented. Therefore, a cut to spending on cultural institutions is not a savings measure, but a self-inflicted wound to the state's bottom line.

Of course, the value of the work of the Connecticut Humanities Council goes far beyond the economic. It has increased awareness of the extraordinary richness and significance of Connecticut history and culture. In addition to supporting innovative projects at the state's flagship institutions, the CHC and the

programs it funds have fostered grass-roots, volunteer-led organizations that make up the unique fabric of our great, but fragile and often unappreciated heritage. The budget of the CHC, in relation to state spending, is tiny—yet the impact of its loss, to dozens if not hundreds of small, vibrant institutions that contribute immeasurably to what makes Connecticut special, cannot be measured, and in some cases, cannot be undone.

Governor Malloy, in his first inaugural address on January 5, 2011, described himself as “humbled by the sense of history that lives within the soul of our great state.” He turned for inspiration to the words of my ancestor, Abraham Davenport, who, when in 1780 the skies of New England inexplicably went dark, urged his fellow legislators to keep to their work:

"I am against an adjournment. The Day of Judgment is either approaching, or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for an adjournment; if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish therefore that candles may be brought."

Reflecting on this utterance, Governor Malloy observed, “Today, we could use a few candles.” The Connecticut Humanities Council is one such candle. I urge you not to permit it to be snuffed out.